

Frequently Asked Questions about the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard

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The questions and answers are arranged in four categories:

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General:

Q1: What is the Draft Federal Facility Identification Data Standard?

A: A "data standard" is a documented agreement among organizations that share or exchange data, including representation, formats, and definitions for such data. The Federal Facility Identification Data Standard provides a common vocabulary to be used by EPA, States, Tribes, and local government agencies to identify federal facilities. The Data Standard is made up of a list of data elements, data element definitions, and formats.

Q2: Who developed the Draft Federal Facility Identification Data Standard—is this another federal mandate?

A: No, this is not another federal mandate. The decision to develop Data Standards, including the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard, was made jointly by EPA and the States (through The Environmental Council of the States (ECOS), an organization that represents the heads of the state environmental agencies). All recognized that sharing and exchanging accurate data is important and will remain so. All recognized that the public increasingly expects and deserves to have clear identification of shared information. Together, they established the Environmental Data Standards Council (EDSC) to manage and guide the process. Action Teams were established to develop several different Data Standards, including the Draft Federal Facility Identification Data Standard. The Action Team that developed the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard was comprised of representatives from EPA, States, and Tribes. The co-chairs were representatives from the State of Texas and EPA.

Q3: Why do we need this "common vocabulary"?

A: There are many different environmental programs, and many different government agencies involved in reporting environmental data. Often, these different programs or different agencies use different naming conventions and different codes when identifying the same federal facility.

Similarly, there needs to be agreed upon naming conventions for identifying the federal agencies that are responsible for the federal facilities.

Q4: What was the business need for developing the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard?

A: EPA has several offices that are devoted to federal facilities. Within the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assistance (OECA), there is the Federal Facilities Enforcement Office (FFEO); and the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OSWER) contains a Federal Facilities Restoration and Reuse Office (FFRRO). These offices track environmental issues for federal facilities and former federal facilities. In addition, other offices within EPA collect specific data for federal facilities. The Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), for example, collects information that identifies federal facilities and their parent agencies. The various EPA programs, however, typically collect and present their information without regard to how other programs collect and present their information. This standard therefore is intended to capture those data elements that are critical to the EPA programs that collect and hold data on federal facilities as well as to standardize the information that is presented to the public for federal facilities. States and Tribes may also benefit by utilizing these data elements and permissible values for their own systems.

Q5: For several of the data elements in the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard, the permissible values include values, such as "city," "county," "municipal," "state," in addition to "federal." Why?

A: There are many instances where a federally owned or operated site is no longer owned or operated by the federal government because it has sold or given away the property to a state or local government or to a private entity. An example is the more than 9,000 former Department of Defense (DoD) sites that now are city parks, industrial zones or local airports. There have been cases where spent munitions or other materials have been found on these former DoD sites. EPA, States and Tribes, therefore, have a business need to keep the link between the present ownership or operation of these sites with their former uses. Permissible values, such as "city," "county," or "private" are tied to the name of the former DoD site to indicate its present status.

Implementation of the Data Standard:

Q6: Will my Agency (or my program) be required to use the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard?

A: No. State, Tribal, or local government agencies or programs are not required to adopt or use the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard, nor to incorporate it into that agency's or program's own data systems. However, once EPA and state agencies adopt and begin implementing the Data Standard, it will likely become the specified "road map" for communications among environmental agencies exchanging environmental information.

- Q7: If my program or agency decides to implement the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard, must it begin collecting information for every data element?**
- A: No. The Federal Facility Identification Data Standard provides a range of data elements that may be of interest to programs and agencies. Programs or agencies may collect information for one or more of the data elements but there is not requirement that any program or agency collect information for all data elements.
- Q8: When is the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard supposed to be approved by the States and EPA?**
- A: The EDSC is expected to review and approve this standard after a 45-day comment period beginning in April 2003.
- Q9: Can some programs within a State, Tribe or local government follow the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard, while others do not?**
- A: Use of the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard is not required, although over time it may become the standard for sharing or exchanging data to or through the EPA national data systems, as well as between state agencies. State, tribal, or local government programs—especially those that do not exchange data with EPA, other Federal agencies or agencies in other states—are certainly not obliged to adopt or work within the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard. However, as it becomes a widely accepted standard, they may find it useful for data management and exchange.
- Q10: I am in a State, Tribal or local government agency. My program doesn't use the same data elements as are used in the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard. Is there an expectation that we will change our data elements?**
- A: No. The Data Standard uses terminology intended for data *exchange* and is applicable only after the data you send crosses the threshold of your organization. Data that is exchanged will need to map to existing data holdings or conform in definition, meaning, and format to the Standard.
- Q11: My EPA program doesn't use the data elements as are used in the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard. Is there an expectation that we will change our own data elements?**
- A: Although the Data Standard is intended for use in data exchange, it is expected that EPA programs will, as necessary (and over time), modify the data elements that they currently collect to conform with the Data Elements and terms in the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard. The schedule for these changes is normally three years, with possible waivers in consideration of modernization and update schedules.
- Q12: Is the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard the basis for a new data system design? Will we have to change our existing data system to conform to it?**
- A: The answer for State, Tribal and local government agencies is No. The Federal Facility Identification Data Standard is more like a dictionary to help translate or

exchange data from any one data system to any other. Use of the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard does not require that any non-EPA agency or program to change its current data system. When data is exchanged from one system to another, the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard will provide the necessary information to ensure that data from a given field in the sending system is "mapped" to the correct location in the receiving system. Local system designers may, once they choose to use this Data Standard for data exchange, elect to modify their system (perhaps in the context of a previously planned system modernization) in order to create the capability of exchanging data that conforms with the standard. As noted in the response to Question 11, above, EPA will be using the Data Standard as its own data systems are modified and updated.

Q13: We are planning to update (one or more of) our current data system(s). How can the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard be of help to us in this effort?

A: The Federal Facility Identification Data Standard provides guidance to programs and agencies on naming conventions for federal agencies and federal facilities and permissible values for federal facilities. Using this information, you can update your system(s) so that it is in conformance with the standard, thus facilitating data exchange between your system(s) and other systems that collect the same data elements.

Q14: Are there any federal funds available to help States, Tribes, or local government agencies that implement federal programs if they choose to update their systems to enable them to communicate more easily using the Tribal Identifiers Data Standard?

A: Yes, although such funding is not linked directly to the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard development effort. EPA has and will continue to provide grant funding to assist other levels of government that implement federal environmental programs. Such assistance has often been used by grantees to help develop and update data management systems.

Q15: What does this standard have to do with National Environmental Information Exchange Network I keep hearing about? And I thought everything was supposed to be in XML—is this XML?

A: The Network concept relies upon common "Data Exchange Templates" (DETs) expressed in "XML," and exchanged based on common protocols. This Data Standard would be used as the starting point or "core" for federal facility-related DETs.

Use of Data Standard:

Q16: Who will use the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard?

A: All Federal, State, Tribal and local government agencies involved in environmental activities with federal facilities are encouraged to use this standard when and if they share or exchange data with other agencies. They are also encouraged to refer to the

Federal Facility Identification Data Standard, and use it as a tool, if they are planning to update or enhance their own existing data systems. The public will be the ultimate user of the standard, because it will provide the common vocabulary that will help such end users better understand the meaning of the data they are reviewing.

Q17: Will EPA be issuing rules for use of the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard?

A: No, at least not in the sense of issuing formal regulations. Information on the standard will be available through the EDSC website and the Environmental Data Registry (EDR).

Q18: Will the Federal Facility Identification Data Standard be open for revision in the future? How will the standard be maintained?

A: Yes. There is every reason to expect that adjustments or revisions will be necessary in the future as new or existing programs or agencies determine the need to collect additional data elements not provided on this list.

Technical Questions for Implementers:

Q19: Several of the data elements in Federal Facility Identification Data Standard provide a range of federal agencies and the naming convention to use for them. What if my program or agency wishes to include a federal agency or subagency not included in this list?

A: The list of permissible values provided for federal agencies are illustrative. Programs or agencies may wish to include additional federal agencies or subagencies that are not listed.

Q20: Do data elements in our application systems need to be the same data type as the Standard Data Element? What if our Data Element field lengths are longer or shorter than the standard?

A: This standard only specifies how information will be exchanged, not how systems should be designed. At times, differences between system parameters and Data Standard specifications may require some translation from a system that uses field lengths, etc. Field lengths in the standard are intended to accommodate the expected maximum length of the values across partner systems based on analysis conducted to date. If a system has a longer value for a given element and the organization wishes to exchange data using the standard, the value exported from the system would have to be adjusted (e.g., truncated or abbreviated). Field lengths in the standard can be increased, if partner needs require this, through the maintenance review of the standard.